



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING RE: GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS
JUDICIAL BRANCH
FEBRUARY 19, 2016**

Good afternoon, Representative Walker, Senator Bye, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Abby Anderson; I am the executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We believe in prevention to keep children from entering the system, and best practice and policy to help kids who do enter the system to be successful.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the governor's proposed budget adjustments for the Judicial Branch. In short, **the Alliance opposes the governor's proposal for across the board reductions by 5.75 percent, and a \$20 million reduction in personnel services.**

The Judicial Branch is responsible for more than 95% of the juvenile justice system. These are major proposed cuts that the Alliance believes are unwise and counterproductive for two primary reasons. First, certain individual program line items have more merit and potential cost savings than others; across-the-board cuts do not respect the need for a more sophisticated budget process. Second, important, urgent recommendations from both the Governor and the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee will require modest resources now, including continued de-carceration of Connecticut's children and expansion of our juvenile justice system to include 18, 19, and 20 year-olds. These are smart, short-term proposals and investment that – based on past and recent experience in Connecticut and nationally – will yield better outcomes and significant cost savings.

Incarceration is expensive and of questionable effectiveness. Community-based and other alternative services are cheaper and show better outcomes for youth and public safety. But it doesn't work to simply close the doors of youth prisons. Programs and services must be created and ready to work with youth, families and communities. Investments must be made initially so that older, less effective, more expensive interventions – like incarceration and detention – can be phased out. We have experience with this approach in Connecticut. When the state stopped incarcerating status offenders, it invested in Family Support Centers to serve those youth. When it raised the age to include 16 and 17 year-olds in the juvenile justice system, it invested in more probation officers and community program slots to ensure the system had the needed capacity. Subsequent budget analysis showed that the 2011-2012 juvenile justice spending in CT was slightly *less* when adjusted for inflation than it had been in 2001-2002, before 16 and 17 year-olds were included.

In sum, Connecticut's juvenile justice system is safer, fairer and more effective than it was a decade ago. Because we have invested in prevention, diversion, and evidence-based rehabilitative, family-centered practice, it is also *smaller* and less expensive than it was before we raised the age to 18. The next exciting wave of proposed reform cannot co-exist with severe short-term budget cuts. Please continue to invest in improved outcomes for our children, youth, families, and communities, and the cost-savings that result.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Alliance member organizations:

AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice / CHDI, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, LifeBridge, Children's Mental Health Connecticut, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children